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NOTE: Additional images and information are available at: www.paulrwilliamsproject.org

Paul R. Williams Exhibit Will Open Oct. 22 at U of M's Art Museum

The first museum exhibition of 20th century African-American architect Paul Revere Williams opens at the Art Museum of the University of Memphis on the evening of October 22, 5-7:30 with a public reception. The exhibit, which continues through January 8, emphasizes the architectural talent of Williams, who worked from the 1920s through the 1960s; but it also sheds light on the personal and professional history of this artist whose parents were originally residents of Memphis.

Featuring 200 new photographs, the exhibit consists of still photographs and slide shows arranged by decade, twenties through sixties, depicting interiors and exteriors of buildings that Williams designed. The images are of small houses, mansions, business buildings, schools, churches, even the memorial for popular singer-actor Al Jolson. Although not all 3000 Williams-designed structures are illustrated, the wide range of his styles and the Williams touches for which he became famous are demonstrated, and unique large-scale photo installations provide spectacular details of seven projects.

Williams (1894-1980) overcame the racial barrier that then existed in the United States by his talent, hard work, astute business sense, and strategic planning of his education and career path. As a result, he became one of the most admired and successful architects of the 20th century, the first documented African-American member of American Institute of Architects (AIA), and the first to become a Fellow of the AIA.

Born and reared in Los Angeles, Williams came to define the high-style look of Hollywood in the mid-1900s, and he was well known as “architect to the stars,” but he always considered himself an expert in the design of small homes. Williams was also a leader in developing new types of buildings that were demanded by the post-WWII suburban economy. His buildings contributed significantly to the popular image of 20th century Los Angeles and to the California style, but his work didn’t stop at the state line or even the national boundary. Williams was also licensed in Washington, D.C., Nevada, New York, and Tennessee, where he designed the original building for St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital in Memphis

and a master plan for Fisk University in Nashville. He also had a busy practice in Colombia, South America, and projects in Mexico, Europe, and Africa.

During Williams' lifetime, his work and his life received extensive media coverage; in fact, *Life* magazine in 1938 characterized him as "perhaps the most successful Negro artist in the U.S...." However, despite his renown and the impact he had on the architecture of his time, today there is only limited, scattered information about him.

His office records were destroyed by fire during the 1992 Los Angeles riots. As of early 2006, the readily accessible body of knowledge about Paul R. Williams consisted of two publications by his granddaughter, Karen Hudson – an elegant 1993 photographic compendium and a children's book about Williams' life; an unpublished 1992 doctoral dissertation by Wesley Howard Henderson about Williams' career strategies; a short list of articles about his work; plus a handful of Williams' own writings.

The Art Museum at the University of Memphis (AMUM), AIA Memphis, the Memphis chapter of the National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA), the University of Memphis Benjamin F. Hooks Institute for Social Change, and the Art Department and Architecture Department at the U of M have collaborated on a multi-faceted Paul R. Williams Project to bring Williams' career back into focus and to help expand public knowledge about this extraordinary American architect, whose success was achieved against a background of pervasive racism in a particularly exclusionary profession.

The project, including the exhibit, is supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Art, and the First Tennessee Foundation.

More information about the Paul Williams exhibit is available by phone at 901-678-2224, via email at artmuseum@memphis.edu, or online at www.memphis.edu/amum